

## WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING

My name is Judith Kratzner. I am the Director of the Madison County Retired and Senior Volunteer Program in Indiana. I am speaking on behalf of the seniors and community I serve and for myself, as a senior age 62.

### *Potpourri of Issues*

I urge continued support of the National Senior Corps so that persons age 55 and older are actively encouraged to remain engaged with their communities through volunteerism. I encourage special attention to the needs of senior persons at the various stages in their senior life (young seniors/Baby Boomers to the Old/Old/80+), at their various ability levels over time and to those at or near poverty level.

### *Engage Old/Old*

While I totally endorse volunteerism as a way of life for persons of all ages, I am concerned that little creativity is being directed in keeping the old/old engaged. This feeds the depression common to this age group. Considering that the old/old are largely women, there is generally a culture among the group which values service to others. This culture should be tapped. Intergenerational projects would be very appropriate. Many older adult persons enjoy the presence of younger persons and there are activities appropriate in interest areas, which can be matched to skill levels of both the youth and the older adult. However, not all old/old persons tolerate young persons well. So, as with all planning, no assumption of uniformity in this age group should be presumed. This age cohort is as diverse—perhaps more so—as any age group. Program goals to attract the Boomers to Volunteerism should not displace effort to retain the engagement of the older volunteer. As has been said, “no person can be wasted.”

### *Utilize New Technology*

Engagement of the old/old in civic activity should take advantage of technology, but should not rely on the seniors' spontaneous utilization of that technology. Perhaps, seniors will more easily embrace the emergence of cell phones, with computer applications, than the imposing “computer”. I do hope cell phone models with a bit more size to them; will be marketed so that visual and manual dexterity issues will not preclude increased senior utilization. While the market place may address this niche the government can certainly encourage innovation addressing the special needs of seniors as they age.

Our family has seen to it that my mother and my father-in-law (both in their 80's) have computers; but new "bells and whistles" so enjoyed by our children are discouragers to the old/old. I, therefore, urge modifications of models for this market to assist with the long distance communication, securing of information and entertainment. As many persons in the old/old live their lives alone having visual and auditory access to others by a friendly technology can be critical to the continued sense of belonging necessary for emotional and therefore physical and mental health.

Pilot grants could help generate data on the impact of the use of this technology to assist shut in seniors continue to participate in their civic clubs and attend programs at their libraries with tele conference access.

#### *Fund National Senior Corps*

Beyond prodding the market development of technology, I want to encourage continued substantial funding of the National Senior Corps. Reductions in any of the programs would be "penny wise-pound foolish". For example, the reduction of Senior Companions--at a time when the population to be served increases, is a poor trade-off of funds.

Special attention to the potential benefits of adult day services--both the social model as well as the medical model is needed as an additional mechanism to continue engagement of seniors in community life. Funding for maintenance of good health should begin while persons are relatively well and not be withheld until there is medical necessity. *Build in incentives for persons to use ADS.* Perhaps caregivers could be allocated more hours of Adult Day Services in exchange for fewer in home visits. ADS is more cost effective due to the group per staff ratio than the one on one of in home services.

#### *Address Mobility & Transportation*

One more area relative to encouraging seniors to continue civic engagement is that of mobility. Here the government could address funding of everything from rehabilitation following surgery and injury, to the provision of transportation services in legislation. Maximize old/old persons ability to get out of their homes to the location of their choice. The ability to have choice of activity is critical to the seniors positive sense of self and as age sometimes takes away abilities necessary for self transportation alternative transportation must be appropriate and convenient. While family and volunteers may provide some transportation it is important that units of government address transportation needs of this population .

## **Summary**

- Focus special attention on old/old segment of volunteers
- Fund National Senior Corps
- Utilize new technology to foster civic engagement & socialization
- Address all aspects to maintain senior mobility

Thank you for your attention to these remarks.

Judy Kratzner

## Addendum

I did not make these remarks at the public Listening Session but if permissible would like them added as relevant to the issue of encouraging the engagement of old/old in the life of the community.

### Utilization of Schools as nutrition Sites

I would suggest that schools be utilized as senior nutrition sites. The nutrition regulations for youth and seniors are similar and one kitchen facility could be used for both populations. The additional benefit would be the mixing of the generations. This could be built upon and possibly incorporated into school objectives and or curriculum. Seniors attending would be available to mentor and or tutor. The seniors would be encouraged to have a vested interest in supporting their schools and the development of the younger generation.

### Utilizing Public Transportation for both seniors and youth/schools

Re examine rules which make funding of separate systems more financially advantageous than combining them. Again the mix of generations could have a positive influence while serving a basic need to transport persons to locations. The smaller vehicles, handicap accessible, would create a positive environment. It is my understanding that the reason Cities use the big busses is that they can get them at a reduced price. Change this practice.

### Encourage age integrated housing for low income and handicapped

Gray ghettos as with ethnic ghettos are not positive in creating good community relations. This trend needs to be reversed by looking at HUD rules. My father-in-law lives in a generationally integrated neighborhood. This means he sees young people and has always been befriended by neighbors who voluntarily assist him with light yard work. When the entire population of a building or set of buildings is senior, this natural reaching out by the more physically able to the less able does not happen without outside intervention. There are wonderful examples of communities where the seniors can help look out for the youngsters and provide neighborhood watchers. There are positive contributions seniors can make to the community and the generations can build respect for each other and support each other.